



Contents

[Case Study](#)

[From the Director, VGEC](#)

[From the Director, VCoA](#)

[From the Commissioner, VDA](#)

[Focus on the Virginia Geriatric Education Center](#)

[Focus on the Virginia Center on Aging](#)

[VCU/Reynolds Grant Update](#)

[Our Family's Webpage](#)

[Aging Acronyms](#)

[Moving On With Parkinson's Disease - 2nd Annual Patient and Family Symposium](#)

[Calendar of Events](#)

Mental Fitness and the Lifelong Learning Movement

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Educational Objectives

1. To identify the functional benefits of continued mental activity
2. To examine the role of Lifelong Learning Institutes in later life
3. To describe the motivations of participants in lifelong learning

Overview - Mental Fitness in Later Life

Baby Boomers and the generation that immediately precedes them tend to have higher levels of education and to be healthier, more active, and more mobile than their predecessors. Because of their nearly lifelong exposure to information on cognitive function and self-efficacy, Baby Boomers may be more likely to participate in activities that help to promote and maintain mental fitness in later life.

Research on successful aging (Rowe and Kahn, 1998) suggests that education and intellectual activities in later life are the strongest predictors of optimum cognitive function. Education and mental stimulation, especially in complex environments that provide a variety of choices and mental challenges, apparently have a direct effect on brain structure and brain cell formation. Furthermore, continued mental stimulation appears to lower the risk of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. Other predictors of mental fitness include social support, a sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, physical activity, staying involved, and the life satisfaction gained from making meaningful contributions to the lives of others and to one's community (Fisher, 1992).

Background - Lifelong Learning and Learning in Retirement

The increase in the older adult population is producing greater numbers of retirement-age adults who seek the type of lifelong learning that is provided by academic education. Many colleges and universities provide space in their traditional credit courses for older learners, and some institutions actively recruit them. Indeed, since at least the recession of the early 1990s, older adults have been prime recruitment targets by many public institutions of higher education seeking to bolster their

enrollments and corresponding full time equivalent (FTE) appropriations from government. However, these older learners often must satisfy all the prerequisite academic education, class attendance, exams and papers required for credit coursework.

The Institute for Learning in Retirement (ILR) has offered an alternative model of noncredit academic education for older adults since its beginning in 1962 at the New School for Social Research in New York City. The ILR concept spread slowly but surely to other institutions. Then, Elderhostel, Inc. entered the picture. Elderhostel itself had begun

in the mid-1970s in New England as a means of complementing the education of older adults whose learning was interrupted by the Depression and World War II; in nonthreatening settings on academic campuses, Elderhostelers launched the continuation of their lifelong learning through weeklong non-credit courses on a range of subjects. They lived in dormitories and shared in some of campus life. Within a decade Elderhostel had spread across the United States, to Europe, Asia, and elsewhere, drawing thousands of traveling older learners to hundreds of learning sites. Still, another form of lifelong learning was needed, one that was community-based, run by and for local older learners. In 1988, thirty ILRs joined with Elderhostel, Inc., to form the Elderhostel Institute Network (EIN), a voluntary association that exists to help establish new ILRs and provide resources for established ILRs. Elderhostel helped to start more than 200 new ILRs over the next ten years. When the EIN dropped annual dues, institutional membership increased significantly, and there are now more than 500 college- and university-affiliated institutes across North America. These are now called Lifelong Learning Institutes (LLIs).

The Lifelong Learning Institute in Chesterfield County

In October 2002, the Brandermill Woods Retirement Community Foundation and the Virginia Center on Aging at Virginia Commonwealth University, the only university-based Elderhostel affiliate in the Greater Richmond area, began to explore co-sponsoring a lifelong learning institute in Chesterfield County, Virginia. The two organizations had met previously to discuss staff training and existing resources, but this was a substantial evolution in the relationship. Brandermill Woods is a retirement community with a foundation board that wished to provide lifelong learning opportunities for its own residents and for the broader community, as well. The Foundation had already conducted a survey of its residents, with an overwhelming response in favor of academic educational programs with peer groups in the community. Significantly, two residents of the Brandermill Woods Retirement Community had previously been involved in LLIs, one at Kingsport, Tennessee and the other at George Mason University in Virginia. These residents spurred Brandermill's action.

The Brandermill Woods-VCoA collaborative sponsorship generated direct support and assistance from a number of agencies, businesses, faith communities, and other groups

to bring the dream of an LLI to fruition. Chesterfield County government was particularly interested in the project, for it was just completing a long range study that predicted, among other things, a rapidly increasing senior population; the Chesterfield County Administrator and the Board of Supervisors viewed the project as a benefit to the county. Chesterfield County Schools offered the use of an old school building that was vacant during the day and the Board of Supervisors designated funds for its refurbishment. This donation kicked the project into high gear.

The Brandermill Woods-VCoA sponsors formed a Steering Committee, composed of representatives from the two sponsors, local men's groups, county and school administration, adult education providers, church officials, local senior groups, neighboring John Tyler Community College, local media, the Senior Advocate, retired VCU professors, and Brandermill Woods residents. Local Rotary groups contributed funds and also helped with repair and painting inside the school. One Boy Scout landscaped the yard for his Eagle Scout project, while a second has undertaken renovation of partitioned rooms into an assembly area. Committees formed to address membership, curriculum development, fund-raising, instructor recruitment, and public relations. In December 2003 the Lifelong Learning Institute in Chesterfield County became a reality, with a formal yet high-spirited ribbon cutting ceremony and well-attended open house.

LLI membership is open to adults aged 50 and older who pay modest annual dues. The college-level academic courses are noncredit, they require no previous educational attainment, and there are no exams or term papers. Members may take as many courses throughout the year as they choose during spring, summer and fall semesters that vary in length from four to eight weeks. The LLI also holds short lectures, single-day seminars, field excursions, and social events. The first Spring Term began mid-March, 2004, with 17 classes in art, music, drama, criminal justice, economics and finance, English literature, Great Books, health, science, computers, history, Spanish, French, philosophy and religious studies, and political science. Sample programs included a lecture on "The Science and Ethics of Stem Cell Research" by the Vice Provost of Life Sciences at VCU and a course entitled "The Middle East and International Terrorism," taught by a career diplomat, with a guest presentation by the Honorable John Hager, State Director of Virginia's Anti-Terrorism Task Force. Spring semester evaluations by the lifelong learners were strongly positive. A four-week summer term begins June 21st, offering courses and lectures on human genetics, the French Revolution, Richmond history, the Exodus, and more.

Case studies: Profiles of Motivation

Older adults become members of an LLI for a variety of reasons. Some are drawn by a quest to learn, others by a desire to share through teaching, still others by the social nature of the classroom or the atmosphere of an experience. To learn more about those who are the Lifelong Learning Institute in Chesterfield County, we have begun a series of

interviews and surveys. The first interviews sought to determine what five participants considered potentially meaningful about the Lifelong Learning Institute experience, what motivated them to enroll, and what their expectations were at the point of enrollment. Although LLIs have operated for more than forty years, there is little published research about them and the motivations of their members in joining the organization, nor does much research exist about the impact of LLIs on members' lives. Gaining more information about the perceived relevance of LLIs in people's lives can help shape the Institute's direction,

contribute to a greater understanding of the interests, drives, and experiences of older learners and the benefits they gain from lifelong educational pursuits, and determine the relative importance of lifelong learning among the values of later life.

Five participants in the LLI in Chesterfield County were interviewed for this case study: three females, aged 55, 60 and 63, and two males, ages 54 and 75. None of the participants had previously belonged to an LLI, although the older male had attended a similar type of program in another state. All of the participants were married, but none of their spouses was enrolled in the LLI. Participant levels of formal education ranged from high school graduate to Ph.D. All were either retired or had not worked outside of the home. All were satisfied with their levels of community and social activities, except for the woman who had not worked outside of her home. The following is a brief summary of the motivations of these participants for joining the LLI. Their real names are not given and some details are modified to protect confidentiality.

Ron is a man in his mid-70s. A high school graduate, he has always wanted to take art courses, to study art and to learn modeling in clay, watercolor, acrylic painting, and drawing. He professes to have a desire to learn several new skills, and to pursue long-held interests that he had never found the time to develop during his working years.

Irene has been involved in higher education her whole life. Now in her mid-50s, she earned a Ph.D., taught at university level, and retired early. She says that she has always enjoyed learning new things and wants to continue learning. She professes a true love of learning, and is a voracious reader.

June, just turned 60, married shortly after graduating from college. She raised a family and launched her children. Being a homemaker was a full time job and then some, she says. She reports having had a "great deal of stress" in her life during these years. However, now that things have quieted, she complains of being bored. Her family was her life's focus and she never worked outside the home. Now she would like to do something for herself. She thinks that the LLI will open doors to developing herself and will bring more mixing or socialization with others.

Philip, barely into his mid-50s, has been a highly successful businessman, earning a Master in Business Administration at mid-career. He keeps himself physically fit and enmeshes himself in community affairs. Of the five interviewees, he stands out for stating clearly that he "wants intellectual stimulation to maintain mental fitness."

Paula says that she would like to "reinforce" what she's already learned and to "expose myself to new things that I have never done or attempted to do." Now 63, she recalls having had a good high school education but wishes to build on her earlier learning. She is concerned about memory loss in growing older and has read that continued mental activity may help with memory retention.

Conclusion

The small sample of five lifelong learners demonstrates clearly how diverse are the motivations of older learners for their involvement in lifelong learning. This finding is consistent with other research (Bynum & Seaman, 1993; Lamdin & Fugate, 1997; O'Connor, 1987). The LLI can represent an opportunity for continued or new self-development, or for engagement with the world outside one's family and homemaker obligations. Some research suggests that many women who have had traditional roles envision the retirement years as a time to start doing something for themselves. At the same time, lives of employment have restricted many men and women to fairly narrow activities; in many cases, they have been rewarded in their jobs for so dedicating their time and energies. Now, near or in retirement, the vista opens for new interests to explore, new subjects to study, new people to meet. The LLI has the potential to meet all of these. Moreover, being ultimately an organization of older learners for older learners, an LLI offers the chance not only to learn, but also to teach, to chair committees, to organize social events, tours, and learning experiences. Moody (1997) includes lifelong learning and late-life creativity as important components in "conscious aging," the fuller realization of, or at least the attempt at, understanding the meaning of one's later years. Cohen (2000) suggests that the lifelong learning experience can nurture inner creativity to enrich and transform our lives. LLIs also offer the opportunity for the participant to contribute to something greater than oneself. The community usually benefits when an LLI emerges.

For more on the LLI, call (804) 521-8282 or e-mail: dleidheiser@brandermillwoods.com

Study Questions

1. What benefits may be gained from mental activity of the lifelong learning type?
2. Discuss the various motivations for involvement in lifelong learning.

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[Back to Contents](#)

From the Executive Director, Virginia Geriatric Education Center

Iris A. Parham, Ph.D.

As usual, this has been a busy time for all at the VGEC. The Parkinson's videoconference has been edited and packaged for distribution and is now available for a nominal fee. The four sponsoring GECs (Mountain State, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Western Reserve) with the Parkinson's Disease Research, Education and Clinical Centers (PADRECC) and the Employee Education Services for the Veterans Administration Medical Center (VAMC) are to be congratulated. Special thanks to the leadership provided by Miriam Hirsch of the VAMC and to our many fine partners in this endeavor. Sponsored by the Department of Medical Assistance Services, the Enhanced Care Assistant Training has just been implemented for a statewide audience of over 250 Personal Care Aides, with a waiting list of 75+. More will be forthcoming as we compile the results of our evaluations from this project. The Fifteenth Annual Virginia Geriatrics Society was a huge success with almost 200 attendees. Next year the conference will be held in Williamsburg. The Virginia Authorized Validation Organization sponsored the second worker course which began in February and will run through October 2004 with over 20 participants, some coming from as far away as Texas and North Carolina.

We worked this quarter and earlier to assure the success of the 2004 annual meeting of the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE), held in Richmond in February. Under the ever-enthusiastic leadership of Dr. Ayn Welleford, the local arrangements chair, and so many committee members and additional partners from here and across the nation, we attained the following successes: There were 490 attendees with many international guests. There were 96 volunteers in total, many new to AGHE, who became familiar with the world of gerontology through their participation in various events during the conference. Much of the behind the scenes work (copying and packet stuffing) was provided by community partners and VGEC staff, friends, and neighbors. There was substantial praise for our local colleagues leading plenary sessions. Drs. Evans and Manning of UVA (Pfizer symposium), as well as our own Dr. Boling (Beverly lecture) presented engaging and informative sessions. An added bonus for attendees was the Second Annual Medical Student Photo Exhibit. It was a moving and a remarkable illustration of this year's "Global Aging" theme. Dr. Boling, Beth Meyers, and other colleagues are appreciated for bringing these two events together.

Through the gracious support of university and community partners, we were able to provide LCD projectors at all breakout/workshop sessions for the first time in AGHE history. We also had more local exhibitors than in previous years, a record number of silent auction items (144 to our typical 100 items) and raised \$2500 (compared to last year's \$1280)! The Special Event at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts was truly amazing. Thank you all for the hard work.

Special congratulations to the Department of Gerontology's 2004 Alumnae of the Year, Ms. Miriam Hirsch and Dr. Helen Wood. Both of these individuals continue to make outstanding contributions to the elders of Virginia and beyond. Our most valued Katie Young was Student of the Year. Mary Ligon and Madeline Dunstan, who have also proven to be outstanding mentors and trainers in geriatrics and gerontology, were named our A.D. Williams awardees. The Iris A. Parham Scholar Awards went to Christie Lang McEwan and Teresa Shuk. Formally, the VGEC welcomes the addition of two Associate Directors, Dr. Jim Cotter and Dr. Ayn Welleford (see the highlight sections). They bring exceptional talents to this position and the VGEC.

[Back to Contents](#)

From the Director, Virginia Center on Aging

Edward F. Ansello, Ph.D.

One to the Tenth Power Is Still One

Partnerships have spoken often about how necessary these are for our success in meeting our mission. As productive as each of us may be as an individual or an organization, if we continue to work alone, we are less likely to make an impact. Each of us, many of us, operating separately constitutes "one." As I like to say, one to the tenth power is still one.

Reading what our colleagues at the VDA and the VGEC share in this issue, partnerships come through clearly. We at VCoA also have had plenty of partnerships so far this year. Starting with our Legislative Breakfast in January which highlighted how partnerships enabled us to be so productive in calendar 2003, even with deep budget cuts, and continuing to the present (May), we have benefited from the talents leveraged in partnerships. VCoA has partnered through two completed annual meetings in gerontology education; an extensive grant proposal built on interrelationships, submitted to the US Department of Commerce, that is designed to bring technology to family councils in nursing homes; a soon to be held conference on elder abuse prevention and response; and an imminent peer review of research proposals under consideration for Alzheimer's and Related Diseases Research Award Fund (ARDRAF) support. The latter is noteworthy. ARDRAF is exceptionally productive as a seed grant stimulus of research on dementia, with a return on investment of about 10 to 1, because of our partners: clinicians, researchers, academics, service providers, and others who serve on the ARDRAF Awards Committee scrupulously reviewing submitted grant proposals. This spring we are honored to have 15 such dedicated professionals partnering with us.

Moreover, partnerships allow us to break new ground. In March we hosted what can only be considered a splendid series of events on spirituality and the quest for meaning in the second half of life: a dinner workshop on conscious aging, a full day conference on the journey of the soul, and a Combined Grand Rounds (with Psychiatry, Patient Counseling, and Social Work) on ethics, meaning, and geriatric practice. Our partnership with the Central Virginia Task Force on Older Battered Women (CVTFOBW) enables us to make real progress in the second year of our V-STOP grant from the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services to prepare and link law enforcement and service providers. Our partnership with CVTFOBW, the Virginia Coalition for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, and the Richmond Domestic Violence Coordinating Committee brought renowned attorney Candace Heisler to Richmond in April for a riveting and motivating conference on elder domestic violence and sexual assault, an unpleasant topic but one that needs airing.

Last summer we helped to launch the Area Planning and Service Committee (APSC) on Aging with Lifelong Disabilities for metropolitan Richmond. We had developed the APSC model during several federal grant projects and helped start APSCs in Arlington, Prince William, and the Roanoke area in the mid 1990s as a strategy for advancing intersystem collaboration to meet the needs of aging adults with lifelong disabilities and of their families. Our greater Richmond APSC is composed of representatives from agencies in mental retardation, parks and recreation, aging, social services, adult services, healthcare, and communities of faith, and caregiving parents. We have been meeting monthly at the offices of the Instructive Visiting Nurse Association (IVNA); anyone interested in issues related to improving the experiences of growing older with lifelong disabilities is welcome to join us.

Of course, we continue to work with our steady partners, the Virginia Department for the Aging and the Virginia Geriatric Education Center. For example, our collaboration with VDA in the Alzheimer's Demonstration Grant

provides dementia related train-the-trainer education of nursing assistants; and we are centrally involved in the highly productive and wide-reaching work of the VGEC, which Dr. Parham notes in her column.

[Back to Contents](#)

From the Commissioner, Virginia Department for the Aging

Jay W. DeBoer, J.D.

Virginia's GrandDriver Program Kick-Off in May 2004

The Virginia Department for the Aging (VDA) is partnering with the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA), the Virginia chapters of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) and the Automobile Association of American (AAA) to present the "GrandDriver" program, which started in May of 2004, to coincide with the U.S. Administration on Aging's "Older Americans Month," as well as the Commonwealth's "Older Virginians Month" activities.

While a great number of older drivers may be good drivers, the physical changes associated with aging can ultimately affect a person's ability to drive safely. To insure that the public is aware of this, the GrandDriver program has been developed to provide information about aging and driving.

Virginia's GrandDriver program urges the public - particularly drivers over 65 and their adult children - to learn more about the effects of aging on driving ability, and to encourage dialogue. The program provides information on the signs to look for in determining whether or not age has affected a person's driving abilities. It also offers information on methods that can be used to help an older driver continue to drive safely, as well as detailed resources for those who may need assistance. Virginia's GrandDriver program:

- Includes an education and awareness campaign about the effects of aging on driving ability;
- Encourages the public to plan ahead for safe mobility before entering their later years;
- Gives older Virginians and their families suggestions to improve their driving skills;
- Provides resources that will help older drivers compensate for age-related changes so that they can drive as safely as possible, for as long as possible; and
- Offers suggestions for alternative forms of transportation to help older Virginians maintain their mobility and independence, if they are unable to drive.

The GrandDriver program has worked with its state and local partners to develop an information card that will be included with all vehicle registration notices to all Virginia drivers. Information is also being distributed in Virginia AARP and AAA mailings. Look for articles that will be published in local Area Agency on Aging newsletters. Billboards and signs on public transportation (buses, cabs, etc.) will further advertise the program. Information is also available on the VDA, DMV, AARP, AAA and AAMVA web sites, as well as the VDA nationwide toll-free telephone number. Public service announcements (PSAs) have also been developed for public radio and local television stations, with Governor Warner graciously acting as the spokesperson. GrandDriver information will be available at statewide events, such as conferences, workshops, public events, health fairs, etc.

The Virginia Department for the Aging is proud to work with DMV, AAMVA, AAA and AARP in bringing the GrandDriver program to the public. For more information, contact Ms. Janet Honeycutt, Director of Grant Operations at the Virginia Department for the Aging, by calling (804) 662-9341, by fax at (804) 662-9354, or by e-mail to janet.honeycutt@vda.virginia.gov

[Back to Contents](#)

Focus on the Virginia Geriatric Education Center

J. James Cotter, Ph.D.

Dr. J. James (Jim) Cotter has been appointed Associate Director of the Virginia Geriatric Education Center. Dr. Cotter is an Associate Professor in the Department of Gerontology in the School of Allied Health Professions at Virginia Commonwealth University. He began teaching in the Department of Gerontology in 1997 and joined the Virginia Geriatric Education Center in 2001. At the VGEC he has facilitated the development of the Geriatrics Health Professionals Mentoring Program.

He received his Ph.D. from Virginia Commonwealth University, School of Allied Health Professions, Department of Health Administration in 1996. He teaches courses at VCU on the problems, issues and trends of the aging, on health

care outcomes, and on organization theory and the US health care system.

Beginning as an outreach worker to older persons in Buffalo, NY in 1975, Dr. Cotter has implemented, developed, managed and evaluated aging services programs at the local and state levels for 30 years. In 1985, he had the good sense to move to Virginia where he served as Assistant Director of SEVAMP Senior Services, the area agency on aging in Tidewater Virginia, until 1988. As Director for Programs at the Virginia Department for the Aging from 1988-1994, he directed and managed services and programs at the 25 area agencies on aging of Virginia.

Dr. Cotter is a member of the Board of Directors of the Southern Gerontological Society and is a co-editor of the Southern Gerontologist. He is a member of the Gerontological Society of America, and the Association for Health Services Research. Dr. Cotter is President of the Virginia Association on Aging. He is also on the editorial board of the American Journal of Alzheimer's Disease.

Dr. Cotter's research interests include special care for persons with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia, transitions of care between health care settings, changing organizational behavior, the innovative delivery of health care services, and the evaluation of health and social services.

He totally agrees with the Academy's tribute to his favorite movie trilogy, The Lord of the Rings, and he wishes he could find more time for watching movies and for traveling Virginia's countryside. He has three wondrous children.

E. Ayn Welleford, Ph.D.

E. Ayn Welleford, Ph.D., formerly Senior Faculty Advisor for the Virginia Geriatric Education Center, will now be serving as Associate Director. Dr. Welleford is Assistant Professor and Assistant Chair in the Department of Gerontology at Virginia Commonwealth University. Dr. Welleford has been with the Department of Gerontology for ten years, having started her position in a part-time capacity. She joined the VGEC in 2000 where she coordinates SEARCH! (Students Exploring Aging Related Careers in Health) among other projects within the Life Long Health Careers (LLHC) Initiative. Her first work with the VGEC was as principal presenter, co-designer and on-site faculty presenter for the graduate video course, Geriatric Interdisciplinary Team Training. Dr. Welleford also holds an affiliate appointment in the Department of Psychology at VCU.

Dr. Welleford received her M.S. in Gerontology and Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University. She currently teaches Psychology of Aging, Aging and Human Values, Geriatric Interdisciplinary Team Training, and Optimal Aging at VCU. She is the faculty coordinator for Sigma Phi Omega, the student honor society.

Her journey thus far in the field of gerontology has provided many valuable experiences. Dr. Welleford has worked as educator, researcher, psychometrician, support group leader, respite care coordinator, and certified nursing assistant.

Most recently Dr. Welleford's attention has focused on the development of the new Geriatric Care Management track to be offered Fall 2004, the new SEARCH! DVD, and a multitude of university, professional, and community organization responsibilities. Dr. Welleford is actively involved in various community board responsibilities including the Carver-VCU partnership, the Senior Center of Richmond, and Senior Connections: Foster Grandparents Program. She is the immediate past president of the Virginia Association on Aging, a member of the board of directors of the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, and a member of the editorial board of the Journal of Applied Gerontology.

Her current research interests focus on family caregiving, attachment style and family relationships, and geriatric career exploration. Dr. Welleford is a qualitative researcher, preferring a mixed methodological approach to exploring the phenomenon of individual experience, because experiences are best understood one at a time.

When she is not busy winning souls to gerontology she enjoys time with friends and family, including her 14-month-old granddaughter, yoga, reading, and preventing "lost arts".

[Back to Contents](#)

Focus on the Virginia Center on Aging

Catherine Dodson, M.S.

Catherine Dodson is a native Richmonder. She began working at the Virginia Center on Aging in the summer of 1989 as a graduate student from the Gerontology Department. Catherine recalls how she met the staff at the Center. During a meeting with Dr. Parham to discuss her practicum requirements, she was told that she could not count her job as Activities Director for a local nursing home and to go look in the file cabinet in the hall for placement listings. In what she describes as "the oldest file cabinet I had ever seen," she found a letter from VCoA's Debbie Snyder requesting a graduate student to work with the Elderhostel program. Catherine had "absolutely no idea what the program was about but I knew I wanted to graduate and had to do something; so I met Debbie and it was like we were two peas in a pod." For the past 15 years Catherine is usually the first person whom VCoA's Richmond Elderhostelers meet.

Catherine says that she enjoys working with older learners, for "they have a wealth of first hand experiences that I have only read about or seen on television." More importantly, Catherine cites her desire to help others as a motivation, something she credits to her parents' influence, especially her mom's. "My goal is to please each hosteler. Working with Elderhostel over the years. I am learning with every new group the uniqueness of people. It is amazing to see how different and yet how much we are all alike."

In coordinating the Richmond Elderhostel over the years, Catherine has worked with five hotels, many staff changes, most of the historical and several of the art sites in the Richmond and Petersburg areas, and more than a few power outages from hurricanes and the like. She maintains that being a Coordinator for Elderhostel requires being a jack-of-all-trades. One has to be a diplomat, organizer, and humorist, as well as being adept at handling various personality types, illnesses, and accidents. She sets up classrooms for instructors, puts the learners at ease, and occasionally serves as a prop for the teachers, as when she models historical clothing.

With typical enthusiasm, Catherine says that she looks forward to the next 15 years at the VCoA. When she is not preparing or coordinating an Elderhostel program, she enjoys spending time with family, close friends, and two dogs.

[Back to Contents](#)

VCU/Reynolds Grant Update

The third annual Medical School Forum "Aging In America: Aging with Grace" was held February 27, 2004. Dr. Peter Boling, costumed as Father Time, served as the master of ceremonies, and Dr. Joanne Lynn from RAND in Washington, DC, provided the keynote on hospice and end-of-life care. The forum featured a presentation from the Geriatric Student Interest Group (GSIG), appearances by two House Calls program patients regarding how they cope with chronic illness, a videotaped interview with one of our nursing home patients, presented by Rita Jablonski, RN, PhD., from the School of Nursing, and a dance review by a local tap dance group (whose members certainly don't let age slow them down.) The Forum closed with a panel that included Dr. Lynn and Dr. Sheldon Retchin, assessing national health policy, the future of Medicare, and the issue of intergenerational equity.

On Saturday, February 28, 2004, the GSIG held its photo contest award reception at the Richmond Marriott Hotel as part of the annual meeting of the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education (AGHE). Three top prizes and 10 honorable mentions were awarded by VCU's own Nobel laureate, Dr. John Fenn. Fifty-four wonderful photos were on display. The theme, matching that of the AGHE meeting, was "global aging."

[Back to Contents](#)

Our Family's Webpage

Sandra H. Randell
Alpha Business Solutions

Gene Cruey and Sandra Randell, business partners and seniors, found themselves thrust into the role of long-distance caregivers as their aging parents living in other states experienced sudden and serious health issues. Their new company, Alpha Business Solutions, was "born" out of that experience.

A familiar story unfolded as Gene and Sandra undertook lengthy road trips, made numerous and frustrating long distance telephone calls, and struggled through inevitable miscommunication with siblings and caregivers.

Additionally, both suffered stress and guilt as they maintained their careers while their loved ones were admitted to healthcare facilities.

As our nation ages and frail relatives require assistance, working individuals such as Gene and Sandra must worry about their personal careers as they provide the means to take care of their loved ones. Gene was an Information

Technology professional and Sandra was a busy IT recruiter. Experiencing the frustration of attempting from a distance to coordinate doctor appointments, daily home help, transportation and just plain one-on-one attention and devotion for their parents, Gene and Sandra felt there had to be an easier way for families and caregivers to communicate.

Combining their career talents and technology, they created www.ourfamilyswebpage.com an interactive web site that instantly creates a family website full of features designed to bring families closer.

Abruptly in new careers, Sandra and Gene became public speakers when they were invited to demonstrate their site to active retirement centers, real-estate companies and care giving facilities. Sandra embraced this new direction, and confidently speaks about the pitfalls and stresses people incur while simultaneously trying to be "good children", employees and caregivers. "Ourfamilyswebpage" is a wonderful tool for busy professionals to use. While at work, a quick connection to the family's site is a discreet and unobtrusive way to get or leave information about a loved one. (Employee absenteeism, loss of wages and decreased productivity are typical by-products of being a caregiver, and are a whole other issue).

Sadly, Gene's mother passed away before the culmination of Ourfamilyswebpage.com; however, Sandra's mother, Ethel, recovered from cancer surgery, hip replacement, and a mild stroke, and remains independent in her own home two states away. The family worried about Ethel's mental and physical condition and isolation, and the solution was to install a computer for her use as an extra means of communication through the website. Gene was drafted as Ethel's instructor (he was once a math teacher) while Sandra observed at a discreet distance. It has been tremendously gratifying for Sandra to see her mother learn how to navigate the internet, become reconnected with relatives back in her native England, and at age 78, not too old to acquire new technological skills.

[Back to Contents](#)

Aging Acronyms

Age in Action will help to clarify the alphabet soup of agencies and programs related to aging services through periodic installments like this.

NASUA - The National Association of State Units on Aging - an association which represents all the state departments for aging around the country.

N4A - The National Association of Area Agencies on Aging - a national membership association for all the local AAAs across the nation.

VAA - The Virginia Association on Aging - an association composed of a variety of professional persons, mostly from academia, who are concerned about aging issues in Virginia.

VAHA - Virginia Association of Homes for the Aged - a membership association representing small, for-profit Adult Care Residences.

VAHC - Virginia Association for Home Care - a membership association of home care providers.

VANHA - Virginia Association of Nonprofit Homes for the Aging - a membership association representing the larger nonprofit Adult Care Residences and continuing care retirement facilities.

VCA - The Virginia Coalition for the Aging - a lobbying organization for aging issues composed of individuals and organizations. VCA develops a legislative platform each year and appears before legislative committees to lobby for support of its various issues.

VCPEA - The Virginia Coalition for the Prevention of Elder Abuse - an individual and organizational membership coalition representing adult protective services, social services, law enforcement, victim/witness, criminal justice, aging, and other fields.

VCSW - Virginia Council on Social Welfare - a membership organization made up of individuals, mostly from local departments of social services, who are concerned about social welfare issues.

V4A - Virginia Association of Area Agencies on Aging - a membership association representing Virginia's 25 local AAAs.

VGA - Virginia Guardianship Association - a membership association made up of individuals interested in guardianship issues in Virginia.

VHCA - Virginia Health Care Association - a membership association representing free-standing nursing homes.

VHHA - Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association - a membership association representing hospitals, nursing homes, and other long-term care facilities.

[Back to Contents](#)

Moving On With Parkinson's Disease

2nd Annual Patient and Family Symposium

June 12, 2004

Richmond

The second annual Parkinson's patient and family symposium will be held Saturday, June 12, 2004 at the Holiday Inn Select, Koger South Conference Center, in Richmond, VA. Sponsored by the Richmond/Southeast Parkinson's Disease Research Education and Clinical Center (PADRECC) and the American Parkinson Disease Association Information and Referral Center of Virginia, the all-day program is specially designed to teach methods to maximize functionality.

The morning session features Mr. John Argue, actor, director and theatre arts teacher, who has developed a unique and powerful exercise program for people with Parkinson's disease. Mr. Argue will demonstrate and teach an artful way of moving and speaking. He will offer an afternoon workshop for exercise and rehabilitation professionals.

The afternoon also features a panel of distinguished physicians who specialize in the treatment and management of Parkinson's disease. These specialists are involved in cutting-edge research and will share the latest developments in the quest to find better treatments and, ultimately, a cure for Parkinson's disease. *For more information about the conference or to request a brochure, please call Miriam Hirsch, PADRECC Associate Director of Education, at (804) 675-6952.*

[Back to Contents](#)

Calendar of Events

June 3-4, 2004

Statewide Elder Abuse Prevention Conference to be held in Virginia Beach. For more info, call Ed Ansello at the Virginia Center on Aging, (804) 828-1525.

June 6-7, 2004

Health Inequalities across the Life Course to be held at the Penn Stater Conference Center Hotel, State College, PA. For more information call (814) 863-5100.

July 17-22, 2004

The 9th International Conference on Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders presented by the Alzheimer's Association to be held in Philadelphia, PA. For more information call (312) 335-5790.

November 19-23, 2004

Promoting the Health of an Aging Population. The 57th Annual Scientific Meeting of The Gerontological Society of America to be held in Washington, DC. For more information call (202) 842-1275.

January 26, 2005

Virginia Center on Aging's Annual Legislative Breakfast, St Paul's Church Parish Hall, Richmond. For information call (804) 828-1525.